

## ***A Kiss is Still a Kiss***

Older adults today are active and doing things they've always enjoyed, including having romantic relationships. "Romance – whether it's just cuddling and caressing, hanky without panky, making out or making love – is blooming in local retirement homes" according to Marsha Kay Seff, a newspaper reporter for the San Diego Union-Tribune. Though the media portrays intimacy and sex for youngsters only, seniors report that they want to continue intimacy.

A report from the Mayo Clinic states, "You'll never outgrow your need for affection, emotional closeness and intimate love. Most people still have sexual fantasies and desires well into their 80s and 90s. Sex may not be the same as it was in your 20s, but that doesn't mean intimacy can no longer be as fulfilling or enjoyable."

Romantic relationships imply commitment, affection, cognitive intimacy, mutuality and sexual intimacy. In later years, intimacy may be expressed in different ways – "sex is not just about orgasm" says Linda Ade-Ridder, psychologist and professor at Miami of Ohio University. Cognitive intimacy – "talking, e-mailing, or even thinking about a beloved – may be as important as physical closeness" according to Margaret Hellie Huyck, professor of psychology at Illinois Institute of Technology.

Older age doesn't mean the end of sexual interest, but injury, disease and most often loss of a partner may end sexual activity as experienced during earlier years. Some seniors may find that changes in expectations, routine (time of day), position and definition of sex (from intercourse to touch including massage or masturbation) increase their sexual enjoyment. If a senior is sexually active, it is important to remember: new partners should be tested for Sexually Transmitted Diseases, including HIV; stay monogamous; and practice safe sex by using condoms.

For more information, the National Council on Aging reports two new books which address love and romance in later years: "*Sex and Love for Grownups*" by Sallie Foley and "*Dr. Ruth's Sex After 50*" by Dr. Ruth K. Westheimer (which is available at the Newton Public Library).